UNITED
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Secretariat

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24 June 1997

INFORMATION CIRCULAR

To: All members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: UNITED NATIONS HARASSMENT SURVEY*

I. JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE TASK FORCE ON HARASSMENT, INCLUDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT, IN THE WORKPLACE

1. In January 1995, the Joint Advisory Committee established the Joint Advisory Committee Task Force on Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, in the Workplace to examine the effectiveness of policies and procedures established in October 1992[1] to promote the equal treatment of men and women and to deal with sexual harassment in the United Nations. Chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, the membership of the Task Force comprises management representatives from the Office of Human Resources Management, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and staff representatives nominated by the New York Staff Association and the UNICEF Staff Association. The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Focal Point for Women in the Secretariat and representatives of the Ad Hoc Group on Equal Rights for Women are also members of the Task Force.

2. At the earliest stages of its work, the Task Force recognized that the creation of a work environment that enables staff to contribute to their optimum potential, as called for in the 1994 strategy for the management of the Organization's human resources,[2] required an expansion of the existing policies governing sexual harassment to encompass all forms of harassment. In order to learn more about this broader concept of harassment, the Task Force studied the practices and experiences of public and private sector organizations in dealing

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with all forms of harassment. It soon became clear to the Task Force that, despite the added dimension of its unique multicultural environment, the global Secretariat's experience was not very different from that of other organizations. Firstly, the degree to which harassment occurs is very difficult to ascertain. Secondly, "targets" of harassment are being subjected to an abuse of power, a circumstance that generally yields feelings (either real or perceived) on the part of the weaker "target" that he or she is powerless to take action to address it. In creating an optimum work environment, it is an organizational responsibility to put into place policies and systems that will provide the means to ensure that harassment will not be tolerated and that, if it does occur, it will be dealt with promptly and effectively.

3. In this respect, the Task Force found that, since the Organization's sexual harassment policy was put into effect in October 1992, only 16 cases of harassment had been reported through formal mechanisms established under ST/AI/379. Given this modest number, there is a generalized feeling in the global Secretariat that incidents of harassment occur more frequently than formally reported. There are also preliminary indications that United Nations staff feel discouraged from reporting harassment. For example, in pilot training sessions, all women colleagues indicated that they would be reluctant to come forward if they were subjected to harassment.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

4. To fill this perceived gap in information, the Task Force initiated a project to survey individual staff members at all duty stations, including field missions, so as to provide them with the opportunity to express in full confidentiality and anonymity their views on a range of issues concerning their work environment. The purposes of the survey are to assess staff experiences and perceptions of workplace discrimination and harassment; to understand how staff members from different cultures, as well as how men and women, may differently define what constitutes different forms of harassment; to evaluate staff members' knowledge of, and confidence in, existing policies and complaint procedures for harassment; and to guide the revision and/or development of policies, complaint procedures and training programmes which will work to create a harassment-free work environment within the United Nations.

5. The questionnaire and analysis methodology were developed by the Task Force, with the expert advice of Klein Associates, Inc., provided through a Ford Foundation grant. Draft versions of the questionnaire were reviewed by staff-management focus groups at all major duty stations. The project and the questionnaire have been the subject of staff-management consultations since 1995 in the context of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee. The project enjoys the full support of staff and management. Moreover, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have decided to join the global Secretariat in its use of the questionnaire, making the survey a first in terms of global magnitude and presenting for the United Nations a unique opportunity not only to better address its own needs in this area, but to help set standards for the international community.

III. DISTRIBUTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

6. Questionnaire packages are expected to be distributed in the last week of June/first week of July 1997. At Headquarters, the survey package will be distributed through Executive Offices. Distribution arrangements for other duty stations will be made and announced locally.

7. The survey package includes one questionnaire available in all six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), a preprinted envelope for use in returning the questionnaire and a preprinted response page for return to the staff response coordinator at each duty station. The questionnaire comes under cover of a message from the Secretary-General.

IV. COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

8. Staff may complete the questionnaire in the language in which they are most comfortable. If we are to address effectively harassment in the United Nations workplace, it is essential that all staff take the time (some 30 minutes) to express frankly their views through completion of the questionnaire. Some of the questions may be viewed as intrusive, possibly offensive. It is important to recognize, however, that the questionnaire has been carefully designed to elicit information on how individual staff members perceive and experience their work environment. It is necessary to have answers to these questions, gained through a fully anonymous and confidential process, if we are to address effectively the concerns of all staff. To obtain an accurate picture of the work environment, it is equally important for those staff members who have not perceived or experienced harassment to complete and return the questionnaire. All staff are therefore urged to respond fully to the questionnaire, as a demonstration of commitment to creating a work environment free of discrimination and harassment.

9. Completed questionnaires should be returned within two weeks of receipt. They may be returned through the internal United Nations mail service at Headquarters, or through diplomatic pouch service at other duty stations, in the sealed envelope pre-addressed to Klein Associates, 440 Commercial Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts, 02109, USA. Arrangements have been made to ensure that these envelopes will be forwarded unopened to this address. If preferred, staff may also, where possible, return the questionnaire by regular postal service or by facsimile. If the latter option is chosen, special care should be taken to ensure that the facsimile has been fully and clearly received.

10. Staff response forms, provided with the questionnaire, are to be forwarded separately to the response coordinator nominated by the staff representative body at each duty station. The role of the response coordinator is to follow up with those staff members who have not returned their response form, an indication that they may not have yet submitted their completed questionnaire. The response form indicates only that the questionnaire has been completed and returned separately. Since the response form is submitted to a different location than the questionnaire, there can be no correlation between individual staff response forms and completed questionnaires. This will enable response

coordinators to follow up in ensuring a high questionnaire response rate, while preserving the full anonymity and confidentiality of the process.

11. The response coordinators designated for each duty station are as follows:

New York:	Ms. Rosemarie Waters
United Nations Office at Geneva:	Mr. Daniel Dufour
United Nations Office at Vienna:	Ms. Maria Luisa Chavez
United Nations Office at Nairobi:	Ms. Ruther Muchene
United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat):	Ms. Stella Otieno Mr. Markandey Rai
United Nations Environment Programme:	Mr. Marcial Yeater Mr. Michael Mwangi
Economic Commission for Africa:	Mr. Daniel Ngangmuta
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific:	Mr. V. Tanghongse
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean:	Ms. Gunilla Ryd
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia:	Mr. A. Adam

The designated response coordinators for field missions will be announced locally at the mission site.

V. PUBLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SURVEY RESULTS

12. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity while preserving the full benefit to be gained from the information gathered, no United Nations staff member will view individual questionnaires. Only the global results of the survey, analysed in broad groupings, will be provided to the Secretariat. Results will be shared first with the Task Force, and thereafter worldwide.

13. On the recommendation of the Task Force, the results of the survey will be utilized to re-examine and revise, as necessary, the definition of harassment in the United Nations workplace as well as the formal and informal mechanisms for dealing with harassment. In so doing, the goal will be to develop policies that are truly reflective of how United Nations staff currently view their work environment and responsive to how staff feel comfortable in having such issues addressed. Training and learning programmes will also be developed to build into the organizational culture the fullest understanding of harassment issues

and commitment at all levels to ensuring that harassment will not be tolerated in any form in the United Nations workplace.

Notes

[1] See ST/SGB/253 of 29 October 1992 on the promotion of equal treatment of men and women in the Secretariat, and ST/AI/379 of 29 October 1992 on procedures for dealing with sexual harassment.

[2] See documents A/C.5/49/5 and A/C.5/51/1. The General Assembly endorsed the Strategy in its resolutions 49/222 A of 23 December 1994 and 51/226 of 3 April 1997.